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### **Task force outlines collaborative efforts to boost market, jobs**

By ROBERT S. HONG, Staff Writer

MEXICALI — More jobs could be created in the Imperial and Mexicali valleys as a result of cross-border economic alliances between Southern California and Baja California.

That was emphasized by the Southwest Compact Task Force during a binational meeting on future economic growth and the urbanization of Southern California and Mexicali here Wednesday.

The task force — made up of the Southern California

Association of Governments and several Baja California officials — outlined the importance of collaboration between the regions, specifically as Mexicali aims toward industrial expansion.

The idea was that employment could increase in the region as a more and more competitive market for drawing in business is fostered.

“(This meeting) is instrumental informational dialogue between the two nations,” said Imperial County Supervisor Victor Carrillo, who along with El Centro City Councilman Jon Edney represented the Valley.

“We need to focus on cross-border traffic and improving the infrastructure,” Carrillo said. Carrillo and Edney are members of SCAG.

While the meeting did not directly address any immigration issues, the conference comes at a time when some think relations between the U.S. and Mexico have become strained over the U.S.’s move toward tougher immigration laws.

“This is a very important time for us. ... Immigration will overshadow everything we talk about,” said task force chairman and Cathedral City Councilman Greg Pettis. “We need to determine ways that we can have full employment (opportunities) in both countries.”

The meeting focused on enhancing international relations through creating more efficient border ports of entry, improving the transportation of goods, workers and people between the regions and taking advantage of the two countries’ proximity.

Ricardo Salcido Vazquez, president of the Mexicali Industrial Development Commission, suggested some U.S. companies that choose to locate in Mexico are looking for more than just low-cost labor. He said



[sergio estrada](#) photo FROM LEFT: Don Rhodes and Nancy Pfeffer of the Southern California Association of Governments and El Centro City Councilman Jon Edney make the most of a break during a meeting with Mexican officials Wednesday in Mexicali.

many smaller companies find it more convenient to be close to the U.S.

He added Mexicali has shown interest in attracting these smaller businesses into its region.

“There’s a big market for the small guy in Mexicali,” he said.

Additionally, speakers discussed creating new seaports for the importing and exporting of goods from overseas, noting again that working together would be beneficial.

But, talk of crossing the border, whether transporting goods or people, included some safety factors that could not be ignored.

“We seek to facilitate commerce and economic flow, but we also have to establish measures to ensure border security,” said Mexicali Mayor Samuel Ramos Flores, pointing out that protecting the security of both nations was just as important as working on economic advancement.

“Our development has many elements that can promote a better economic condition (for both regions),” he said.

Edney, who helped facilitate the day’s discussion, said addressing issues was critical to the future of the area and an opportunity for the private sector to expand.

His comments were echoed by Carrillo.

“One of the important factors is that you put a face on this entity,” Carrillo said, referring to the creation of the task force. “This stops the fear (of doing cross-country business). Communication is the key to success.”